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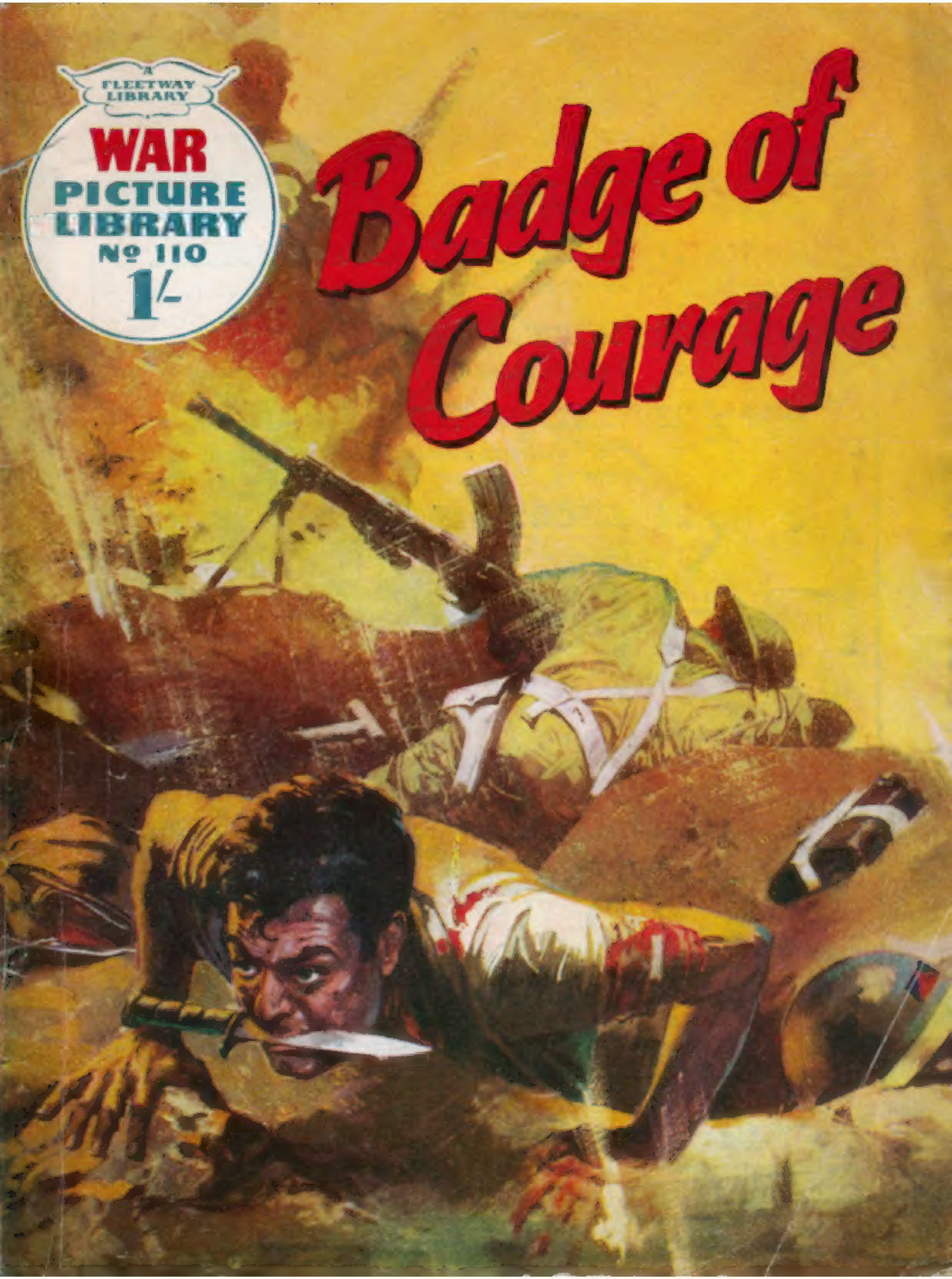
Badge of Courage



4 ALL-ACTION ISSUES EVERY MONTH

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An evil enemy must be fought—to the death !

★ No. 22 **FORT BLOOD**
A ghastly secret was locked in the fortress of doom !

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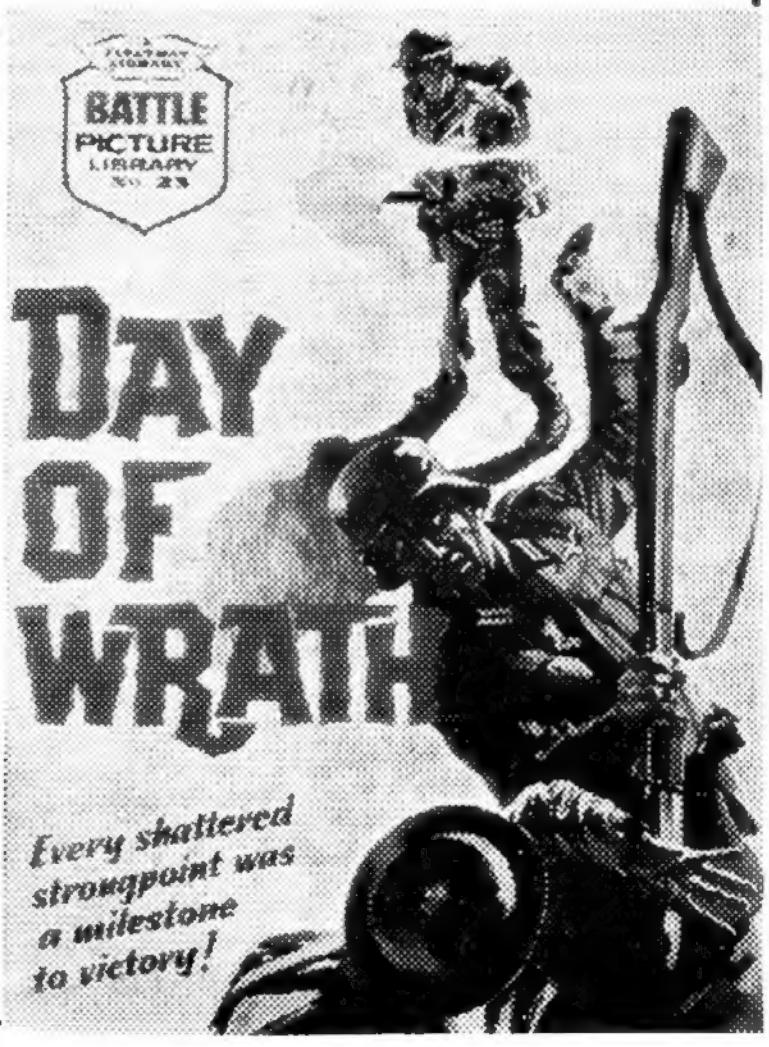

BADGE of COURAGE

FROM ALAMEIN TO TRIPOLI IN 80 DAYS! 1300 MILES OF BURNING DESERT, OF ENEMY MINEFIELDS, BOOBY TRAPS, WRECKED ROADS AND BAD WEATHER. SUCH WAS THE AMAZING ADVANCE OF THE IMMORTAL BRITISH EIGHTH ARMY IN PURSUIT OF THE MIGHTY GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS.

BY JANUARY 23RD., 1943, THE BATTLE-GRIMED BUT TRIUMPHANT ALLIED FIGHTING MEN WERE MARCHING INTO CAPTURED TRIPOLI, VITAL SUPPLY PORT.

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Chapter 1. TROUBLE SPOT

THE SERGEANT STARED ACROSS THE RUBBLE-STREWN STREET WITH INDECISION IN HIS EYES, YET FEAR HAD NO PLACE IN HIS MAKE-UP...
THEY'VE GOT US TIED DOWN... AND THE LADS DEPEND ON ME TO GET 'EM OUT!

TOM CORDER'S HESITATION WAS NOT LOST ON THE BURLY COCKNEY PRIVATE, ALF SNELL...
COME ON, SARGE...WE'VE GOTTA DO SOMETHING!

TOM CORDER HAD NEVER LIKED THE LONDONER WITH HIS CONTINUAL NIGGLING AT THE MAN IN AUTHORITY.
WHAT'S YOUR IDEA, THEN, SNELL?
ME, SARGE ...I AIN'T IN CHARGE, AM I?
THE SERGEANT GRINNED MIRTHLESSLY FOR HE KNEW THAT SNELL HAD NOTHING TO OFFER.

THE INCESSANT WHINE AND SNAP OF THEIR TORMENTORS' BULLETS WAS MAKING THE MEN EDGY.
WE'VE GOT TO MOVE, SARGE!
. . . OR GET THOSE PERISHING JERRIES!
ALL RIGHT, LADS . . . TAKE IT EASY! STAY HERE . . . AND GIVE ME COVERING FIRE . . . I NEED IT.

SNATCHING UP SOME GRENADES, TOM CORDER SLIPPED FROM THE BUILDING INTO THE BLINDING SUNLIGHT OF THE OPEN STREET.
MAYBE THERE'S SOME CLEVER WAY OF SMOKING OUT THOSE NAZIS . . . BUT THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I KNOW.

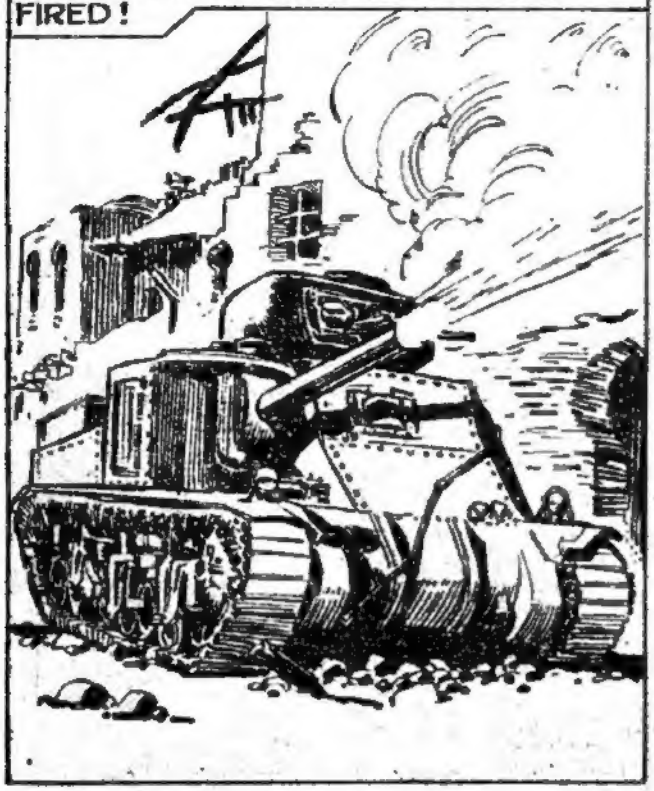
THE PATCH OF COVER NEAREST TO THE SNIPER'S BUILDING WAS TWENTY YARDS AWAY. THE SERGEANT FLUNG HIMSELF ACROSS THAT VULNERABLE OPEN SPACE.
FIRE AT THE JERRIES ...KEEP THEIR HEADS DOWN!

THE N.C.O. DIVED INTO THE COVER OF THE DEBRIS MIRACULOUSLY UNHARMED BUT THE ENEMY'S FIRE MADE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO HURL THE GRENADES ACCURATELY.
IF THIS DOESN'T REACH, WE'VE HAD IT!

IT DID NOT REACH . . . AND DESPITE THE SERGEANT'S PANTING EFFORTS, NEITHER DID THE REST OF HIS GRENADES. RAUCOUS CRIES OF DERISION GREETED THIS FAILURE . . .
THE ENGLANDER HAS THE STRENGTH OF A CHICKEN!
A LITTLE CLOSER, MEIN FREUND!

DESPERATELY, TOM CORDER RACKED HIS BRAINS. HE WAS IN A SPOT AND HE KNEW IT. THEN CAME A FAMILIAR SOUND . . . A HARSH METALLIC CLANGING . . . AND IT WAS COMING STEADILY NEARER . . .
A TANK! ONE OF OURS!

THE TANK COMMANDER SWIFTLY PIN-POINTED THE SNIPERS. HIS 75 M.M. GUN SWUNG MENACINGLY AT HIS DIRECTION! . . STEADIED. . . AND FIRED!



FOUR. . . FIVE. . . SIX TIMES THE GRANT'S GUN ROARED, BRINGING AN AVALANCHE OF DEBRIS CRASHING ABOUT THE SNIPERS NEST.

SERGEANT TOM CORDER ROSE TO HIS FEET AS DUSTY FIGURES BEGAN TO STRAGGLE FROM THE WRECKED BUILDING.

AS TOM CORDER MARCHED HIS MIXED PARTY BACK TO THE COMMAND POST, HE COULD NOT HELP OVERHEARING THE SARDONIC REMARKS OF HIS MEN . . .
WE GOT OUT OF THAT BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH!
A FINE MESS, SERGEANT BLOOMIN' CORDER MADE OF IT. . . IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT GRANT. . .

TOM MADE HIS REPORT TO HIS TROOP COMMANDER, CAPTAIN BICKNELL AND WENT ON TO UNBURDEN HIMSELF TO THE QUIET RESOLUTE OFFICER. . .
I CAN USUALLY LOOK AFTER MYSELF, SIR. . . BUT WHEN THERE ARE OTHERS RELYING ON ME, I SEEM TO DRY UP OF IDEAS.
SO DO THE BEST OF US, SERGEANT. . . .THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMAND CAN WEIGH HEAVILY. . . .

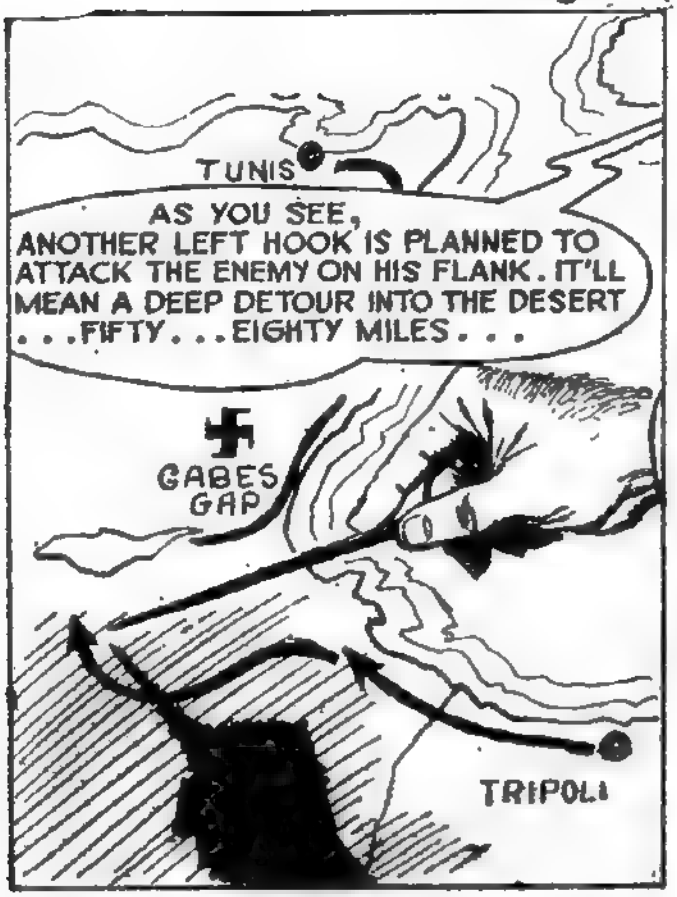
NONE THE LESS, I HAVE A HIGH REGARD FOR YOUR QUALITIES, CORDER. IN FACT, I THINK YOU'D MAKE GOOD OFFICER MATERIAL.
ME, A COMMISSION, SIR? NO THANKS... I RECKON I KNOW MY LIMITATIONS!

NO MAN KNOWS HIS LIMIT UNTIL HE'S REALLY PUSHED, SERGEANT.
I WAS PUSHED ALL RIGHT TODAY, SIR!
I WONDER...
CAPTAIN BICKNELL STRODE OFF, LEAVING THE SERGEANT LOOKING THOUGHTFULLY AFTER HIM.

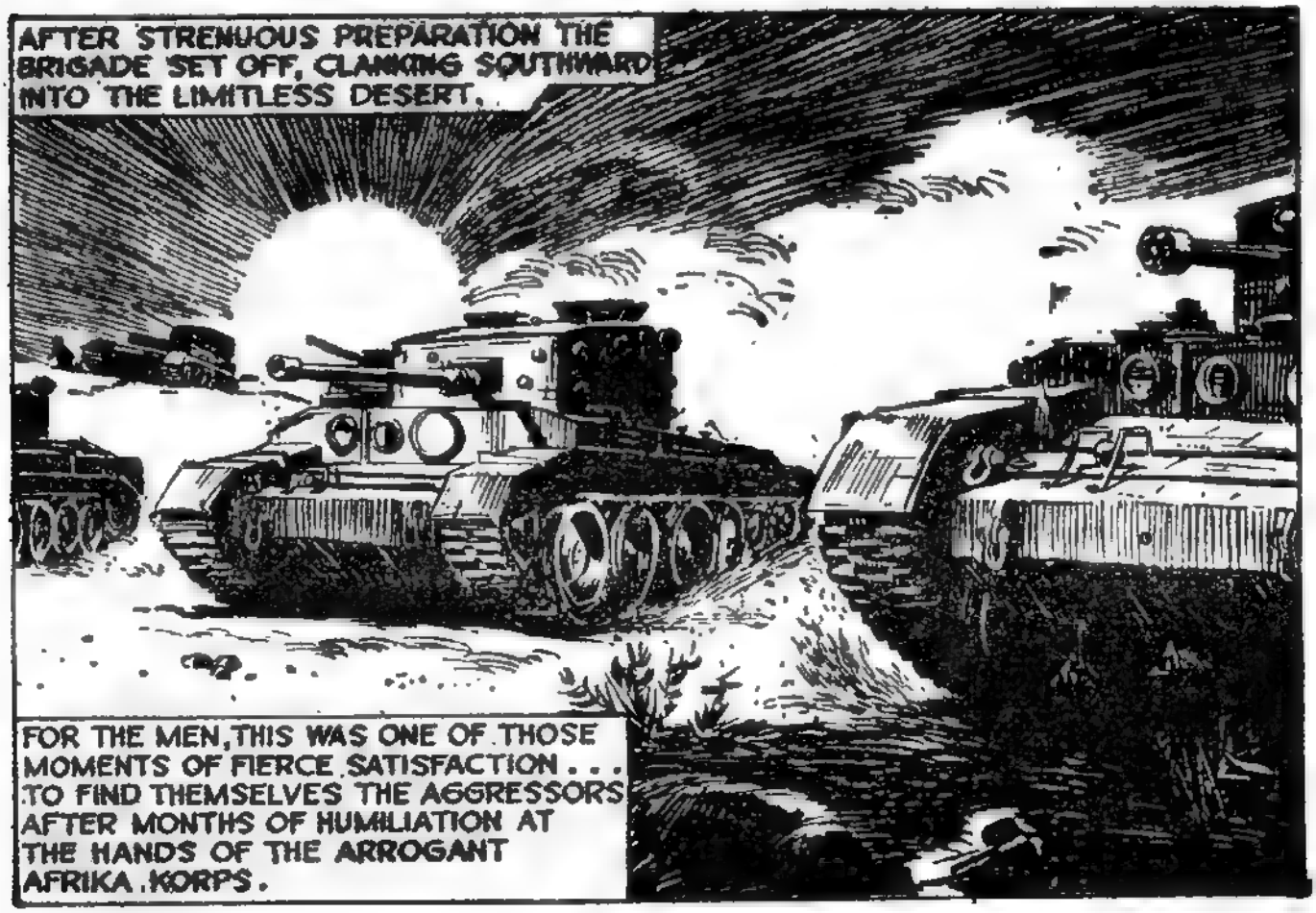
FOR A TIME SERGEANT TOM CORDER'S DESTINY BECAME SUBMERGED IN THE RAGING TIDE OF BATTLE WHICH NOW CARRIED THE FIGHTING ALLIES BEYOND TRIPOLI AND INTO TUNISIA ITSELF... THE GERMANS' LAST FOOTHOLD IN NORTH AFRICA.
BACK! BACK TO FORTIFIED POSITIONS!
FINAL VICTORY FOR THE ALLIES IN THIS GIGANTIC DRAMA OF THE WESTERN DESERT WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE RELENTLESS SHAPE.

SNATCHING A BREATHER, THE 8TH. ARMY PLANNED ITS NEXT MOVE . . . THE CAPTURE OF THE ALL-IMPORTANT GABES GAP SOME HUNDRED MILES AHEAD.
BRIGADE BRIEFING AT TEN-THIRTY SHARP... FULL MUSTER ALL OFFICERS AND SENIOR N.C.O.s...RIGHT?
RIGHT, SIR!

PRECISELY AT TEN-THIRTY THAT MORNING, BRIGADIER BULLER BEGAN HIS CONFERENCE. THE BURLY STAFF OFFICER'S LANGUAGE WAS SIMPLE AND FORCEFUL . . .
HERE IS THE ENEMY, DEFENDING THE TRICKY GABES GAP. HE'LL BE PUSHED BACK ALL RIGHT. . . BUT NOT WITHOUT A DEVIL OF A FIGHT!


TUNIS
AS YOU SEE, ANOTHER LEFT HOOK IS PLANNED TO ATTACK THE ENEMY ON HIS FLANK. IT'LL MEAN A DEEP DETOUR INTO THE DESERT ...FIFTY...EIGHTY MILES...
GABES GAP
TRIPOLI

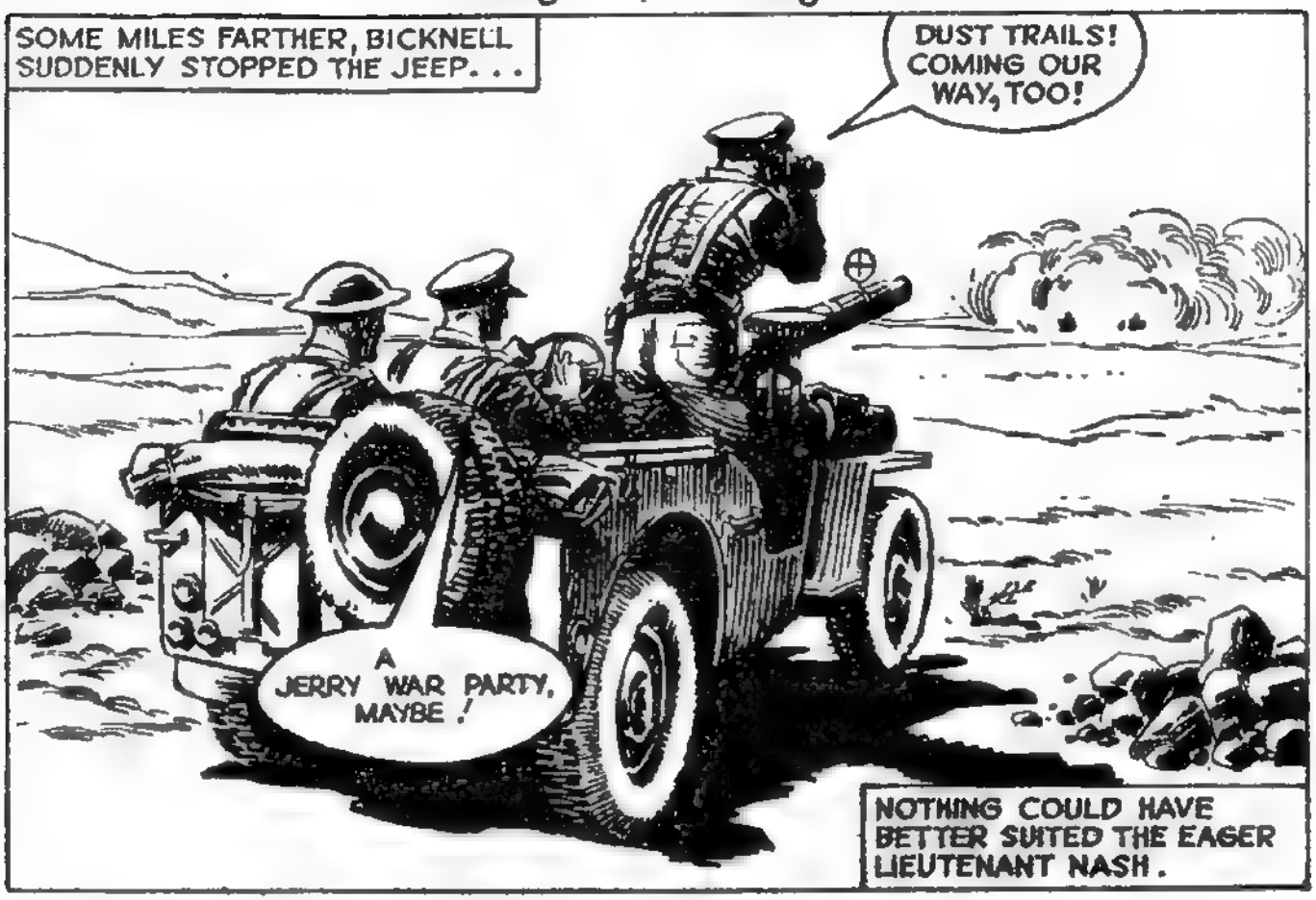
THIS IS INTENDED TO BE A CRIPPLING PUNCH TO ROMMEL'S RIBS, GENTLEMEN ...AND THIS BRIGADE HAS THE GOOD LUCK TO BE CALLED UPON TO DELIVER IT! NOW, LISTEN CAREFULLY...
AMIDST A RUSTLE OF EXCITEMENT, THE BRIGADIER BEGAN TO GIVE THE COMPLEX DETAILS OF SETTING A FULL ARMOURED BRIGADE INTO MOTION.


AFTER STRENUOUS PREPARATION THE BRIGADE SET OFF, CLANKING SOUTHWARD INTO THE LIMITLESS DESERT.
FOR THE MEN, THIS WAS ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS OF FIERCE SATISFACTION... TO FIND THEMSELVES THE AGGRESSORS AFTER MONTHS OF HUMILIATION AT THE HANDS OF THE ARROGANT AFRIKA KORPS.

Chapter 2. ORDER of BATTLE

IN THE COLD LIGHT OF DAWN NEXT MORNING, THE SERGEANT HAD HIS PARTY LINED UP AND READY, INCLUDING A DISGRUNTLED PRIVATE SNELL.
TRUST CORDER TO PICK ME, JUST TRYING TO GET HIS OWN BACK.
AW . . . STOP MOANING, SNELL
HERE'S CAPTAIN BICKNELL ...PARTY...SHUN!

AFTER A FEW BRIEF WORDS, CAPTAIN BICKNELL LED THE WAY IN A JEEP WITH LIEUTENANT NASH AT THE WHEEL. SOON THE SUN WAS CLIMBING INTO A GLARING BLUE SKY AND BLAZING DOWN UPON THEM.
ENEMY COUNTRY NOW... EYES PEELED!

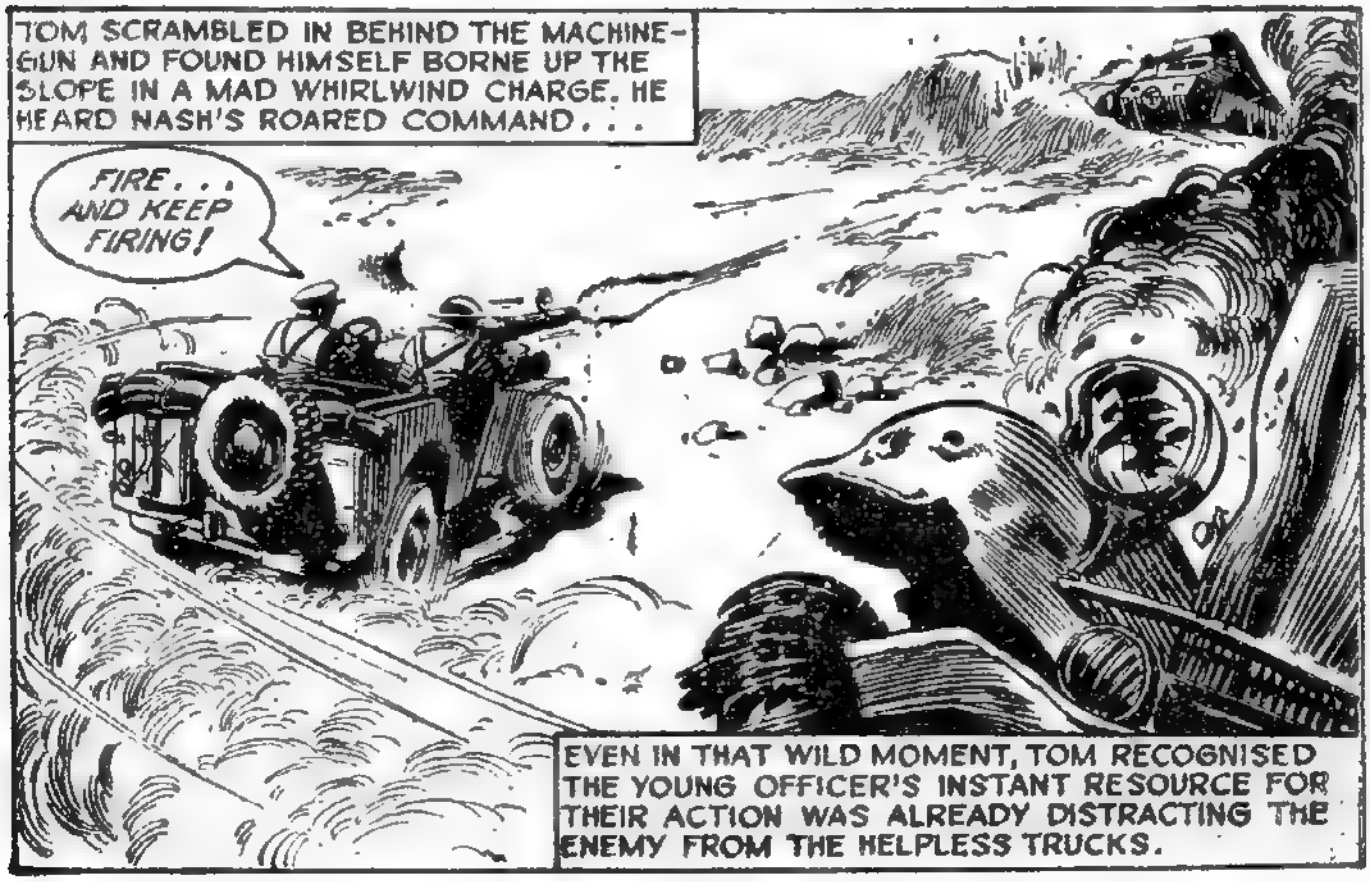

SOME MILES FARTHER, BICKNELL SUDDENLY STOPPED THE JEEP. . .
DUST TRAILS! COMING OUR WAY, TOO!
A JERRY WAR PARTY, MAYBE!
NOTHING COULD HAVE BETTER SUITED THE EAGER LIEUTENANT NASH.

JEEP AND TRUCKS WERE HASTILY DRIVEN INTO THE CONCEALMENT OF A HOLLOW AND BICKNELL STUDIED THE APPROACHING VEHICLES.
IS IT JERRIES, MISTER NASH?
YES, CORDER . . . IF WE'RE LUCKY!

SOON, THE SQUAT, UGLY SHAPES MATERIALISED OUT OF THE DUST, LEAVING CAPTAIN BICKNELL IN NO DOUBT . . .
ENEMY TANKS IN FORCE . . . COMING OUR WAY!

THE NEXT SECOND THE CRASH OF A SINGLE GUN SPUN HIM ROUND . . .
BY HEAVENS . . . A JERRY SCOUT CAR! THEY'RE ON US!

A SINGLE ENEMY ARMOURED CAR, MOVING IN UNSEEN FROM THE FLANK HAD SURPRISED THE HIDDEN BRITISH FORCE.
QUICK, SERGEANT! JUMP IN AND GRAB THIS GUN!
RIGHT, SIR!


TOM SCRAMBLED IN BEHIND THE MACHINE-GUN AND FOUND HIMSELF BORNE UP THE SLOPE IN A MAD WHIRLWIND CHARGE. HE HEARD NASH'S ROARED COMMAND...
FIRE... AND KEEP FIRING!
EVEN IN THAT WILD MOMENT, TOM RECOGNISED THE YOUNG OFFICER'S INSTANT RESOURCE FOR THEIR ACTION WAS ALREADY DISTRACTING THE ENEMY FROM THE HELPLESS TRUCKS.

ACH, HIMMEL! IT IS LIKE TRYING TO SHOOT A JUMPING BEAN!

TOM KNEW HIS GUN WAS ALL BUT USELESS AGAINST THE ENEMY'S ARMOUR, BUT ONE LUCKY BULLET SLICED THROUGH THE DRIVER'S OBSERVATION SLIT. . .
AAARGH!

THE ENEMY GUN CEASED ITS VICIOUS BARK. . .
BY GOLLY! I BELIEVE YOU'VE HIT SOMEONE, SERGEANT. WELL DONE!

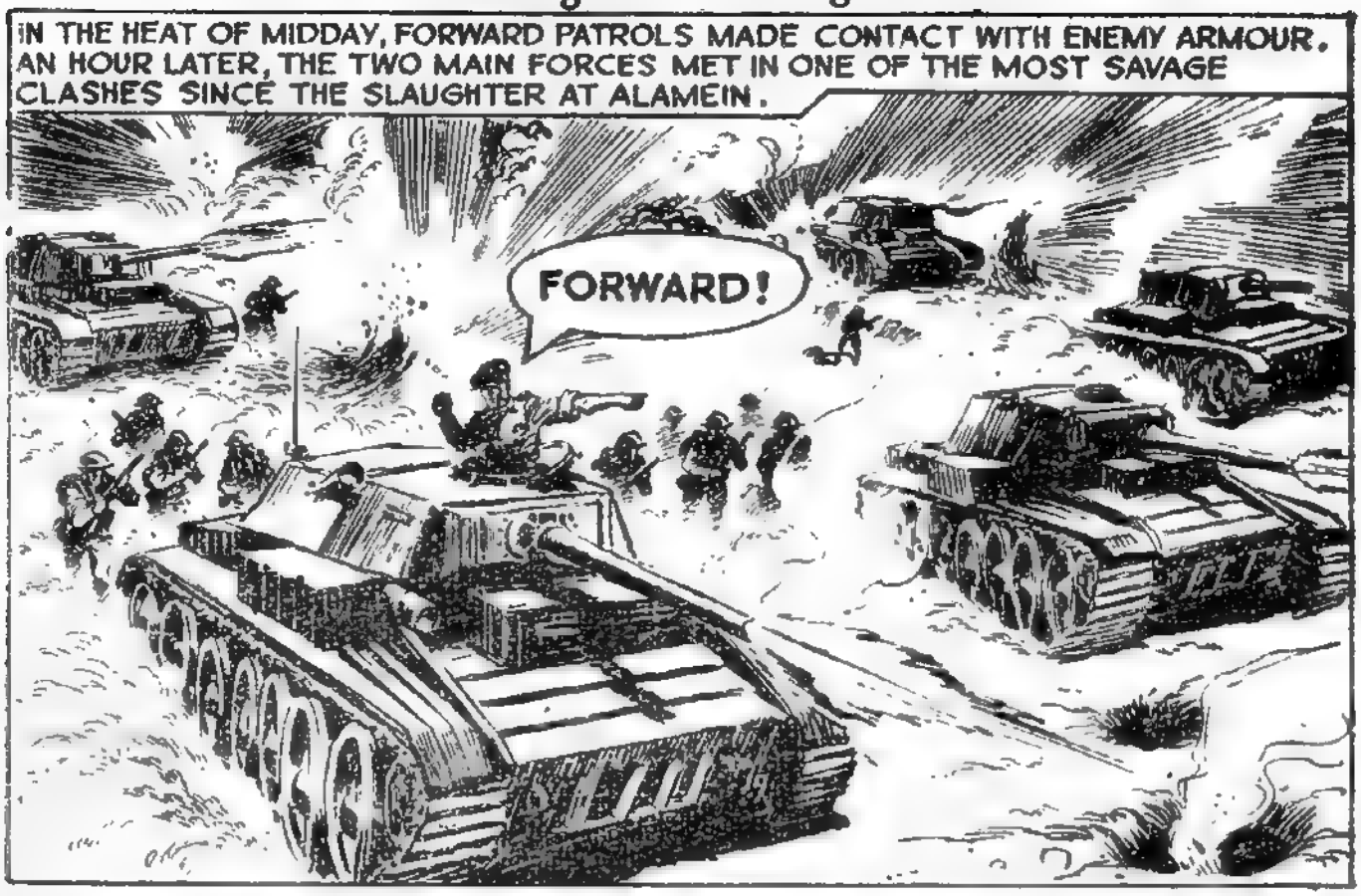
NASH THEN RACED PAST CAPTAIN BICKNELL WHO TOOK A FLYING LEAP ABOARD. THE TRUCKS WERE ALREADY ACCELERATING AWAY FROM THE SCENE.
JUMP IN, SKIPPER!
NICE WORK, NASH!

AT FULL SPEED, THE CONVOY WAS HEADING BACK TO WARN THE BRIGADE OF THE ADVANCING ENEMY. . .
THAT WAS SOME COOL ACCURATE SHOOTING BY OUR SERGEANT!
IT DID THE TRICK, ALL RIGHT!
THANKS TO MISTER NASH. I ONLY WISH I COULD THINK AS QUICKLY AS THAT.

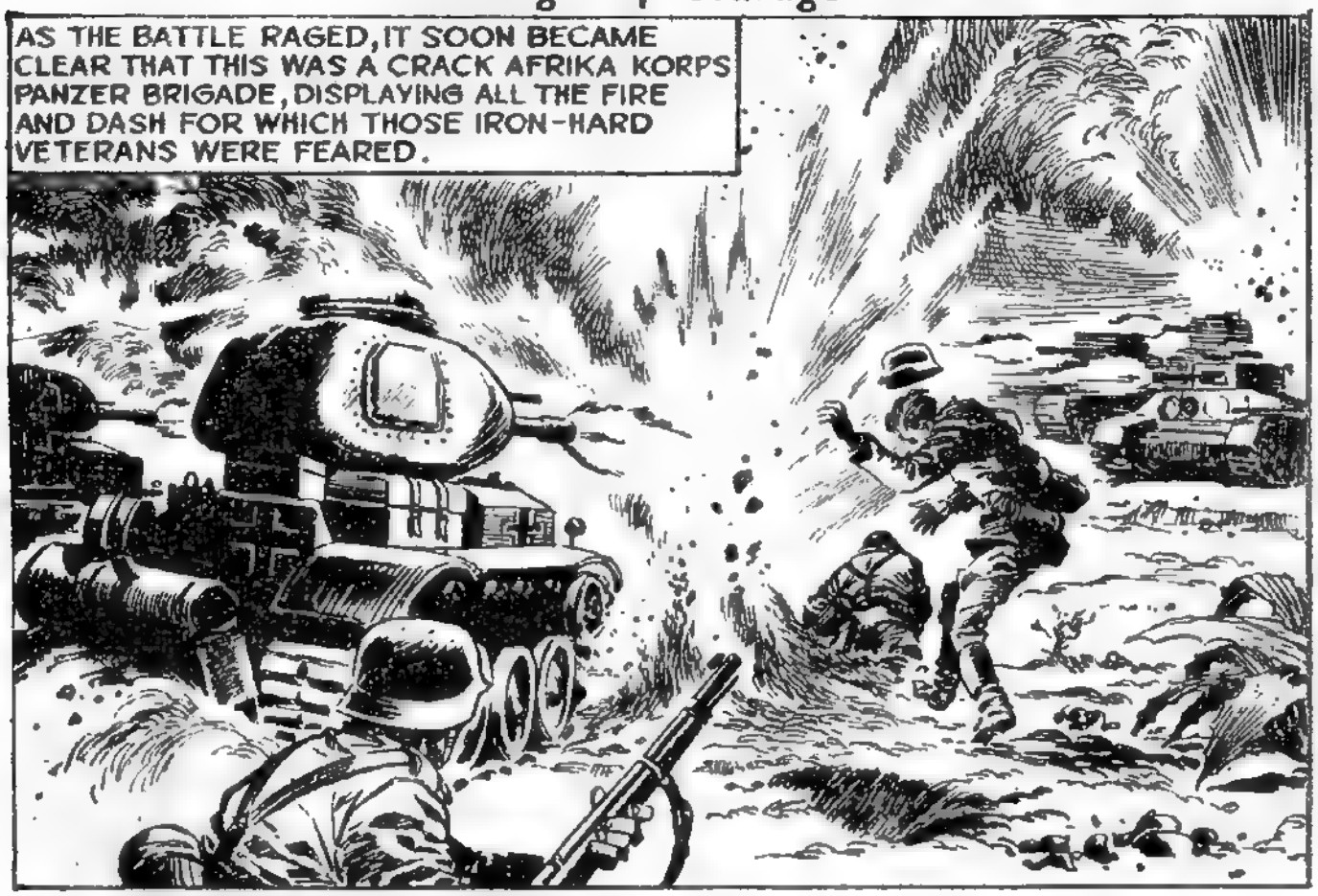
TWO HOURS LATER, BICKNELL HAD GIVEN HIS URGENT NEWS. BUT EVEN AMIDST THE ORDERLY CONFUSION OF AN ARMOURED BRIGADE SPRINGING TO READINESS THE CAPTAIN FOUND TIME FOR A WORD WITH HIS SERGEANT.
YOU WERE FIRST RATE, TODAY, CORDER...AND YOU STILL WON'T THINK ABOUT A COMMISSION?
IT WAS MISTER NASH, REALLY, SIR. IF I COULD ONLY COPE LIKE HIM...
TOM'S VOICE TRAILED OFF IN RUEFUL SPECULATION OF THE QUALITIES REQUIRED OF AN OFFICER.

THE CAPTAIN'S PARTING WORDS WERE SOMEWHAT BRIEF AND ENIGMATIC.
SOME MEN NEVER FIND THEMSELVES UNTIL THEY MEET REAL TROUBLE. LET'S HOPE YOU'RE LUCKY, SERGEANT!
Y...YES, SIR!

SOON THE FEVERISH ACTIVITY CEASED AND BRIGADIER BULLER'S ARMOURED SQUADRONS WERE ROLLING FORWARD WITH EVERY EYE STRAINING FOR SIGNS OF THE ENEMY.
SHOULDN'T BE LONG NOW, CHAPS!


IN THE HEAT OF MIDDAY, FORWARD PATROLS MADE CONTACT WITH ENEMY ARMOUR. AN HOUR LATER, THE TWO MAIN FORCES MET IN ONE OF THE MOST SAVAGE CLASHES SINCE THE SLAUGHTER AT ALAMEIN.
FORWARD!

THE TANKS MANOEUVRED INTRICATELY LIKE VESSELS OF THE LINE, THEIR GUNS SENDING SOLID SHOT STREAKING LOW ACROSS THE DESERT SAND INTO THE RANKS OF THEIR OPPONENTS.


AS THE BATTLE RAGED, IT SOON BECAME CLEAR THAT THIS WAS A CRACK AFRIKA KORPS PANZER BRIGADE, DISPLAYING ALL THE FIRE AND DASH FOR WHICH THOSE IRON-HARD VETERANS WERE FEARED.

NOT UNTIL THE BRITISH FORCE WAS TESTED TO ITS LIMITS, DID THE STUBBORN GERMANS BREAK OFF THE ACTION AND WITHDRAW SOUTHWARD . . .
921

MUCH AS HE DEARLY WISHED TO PURSUE, BRIGADIER BULLER WAS OBLIGED TO CALL A HALT UNTIL NEEDED SUPPLIES CAUGHT UP WITH THEM AND REPAIRS MADE. BUT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF SITTING IDLE . . .
AH, THERE YOU ARE, BICKNELL. COME WITH ME . . . I'VE HAD A LITTLE IDEA.
VERY GOOD, SIR.

IT WAS AS A RESULT OF THIS CONFERENCE THAT TOM CORDER FOUND HIMSELF ONCE MORE BEFORE CAPTAIN BICKNELL.
IT'S ANOTHER RECCE JOB, SERGEANT . . . BUT NOT FOR SIGNS OF THE ENEMY THIS TIME . . . SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT.
DIFFERENT SIR?

BICKNELL WAITED TILL HE HAD SPREAD A SKETCH MAP. . .
GABES GAP IS TO OUR RIGHT. . . THE ENEMY HAS GONE TO OUR LEFT . . . AHEAD OF US IS THE JERIDA BELT. . .
JERIDA BELT. . . A MASS OF QUICKSANDS, ISN'T IT?
GABE
CHOTT JERIDA

BICKNELL NODDED GRIMLY. . .
EXACTLY. . . IT'S MILES OF SALT MARSHES. . . QUICKSANDS. . . BARE SCRUB. . . AND WE'VE GOT TO TRY AND FIND A TRACK ACROSS IT!
ACROSS THAT DEATH-TRAP? GREAT SCOTT! WHATEVER FOR?

ONCE AGAIN, BICKNELL POINTED TO HIS MAP AND TOLD THEM OF THE BRIGADIER'S CONVICTIONS.
GABES GAP
GAB
CHOTT JERIDA
HE THINKS THE ENEMY ARMOUR WILL ROUND THIS SOUTHERN TIP AND REJOIN ROMMEL BY COMING UP THE OTHER SIDE. . . AND THAT'S WHERE WE HOPE JERRY WILL BE UNLUCKY. . .

. . . BECAUSE IF WE CAN FIND A TRACK ACROSS THE JERIDA BELT FIRM ENOUGH TO TAKE THE WHOLE BRIGADE. . .
. . . WE'LL CATCH THOSE PANZER BOYS ON THE OTHER SIDE. . . WOW!
IT'S QUITE A THOUGHT, SIR!

Chapter 3. LAND of DEATH

BY EARLY AFTERNOON, BICKNELL WAS LEADING THEM INTO THE JERIDA BELT, THAT IMMENSE AND FORBIDDING STRETCH OF WASTELAND, WHERE NOT EVEN THE ARABS DARE SET FOOT.

DESPITE CAPTAIN BICKNELL'S EFFORTS, THE MAPPING WAS A SLOW JOB . . .
WE'VE BEEN TWO DAYS DOING FOURTEEN MILES . . .
. . . AND THIS BELT MUST BE FORTY MILES ACROSS.
YET SPEED, AS BRIGADIER BULLER HAD INSISTED, WAS VITAL.

THEN ON THE THIRD DAY THEY SAW LIEUTENANT NASH MAKING VIGOROUS SIGNALS FROM A LITTLE WAY AHEAD AND BICKNELL AND TOM CORDER HURRIED TO JOIN THE YOUNG OFFICER . . .
LOOKS A FAIRLY SMALL PARTY, SIR.
LOOK, JERRIES! JUST PAST THAT BOULDER!
BY HECK, YES!

BICKNELL WHIPPED UP HIS GLASSES.
THREE TRUCKS... A WIRELESS VAN... ABOUT FIFTEEN OR SO JERRIES.
WHAT THE DICKENS ARE THEY DOING IN THIS FORSAKEN SPOT?

IT WAS TOM CORDER WHO MADE THE STARTLING SUGGESTION . . .
I BET THEY'RE MAPPING A ROUTE, TOO!
YES, BY GEORGE . . . FROM THE OTHER SIDE!
YOU'RE RIGHT, CORDER! THEY'RE KNOCKING IN GUIDE STAKES.

AT ONCE BICKNELL WAS BRISKLY IN COMMAND . . .
WE'VE GOT TO LIQUIDATE THOSE JERRIES. NOW THIS IS WHAT WE'LL DO . . .
FOR TOM IT WAS ANOTHER LESSON IN RESOLUTE LEADERSHIP.

BICKNELL'S ATTACK WAS BOLD AND WELL-CONCEIVED . . . ADVANCING IN SHORT RUSHES UNDER METHODICAL COVERING FIRE.
ACH, WE ARE, ATTACKED!
FEUER! FEUER!
BUT, IN THE EXCITEMENT, THE BRITISH FORGOT THAT NATURE HERSELF HAD STREWN THIS TERRAIN WITH HER OWN SINISTER WEAPON . . .
AAARRGH!
QUICKSANDS! GET BACK!

TO BICKNELL'S DISGUST, THIS BROKE UP THE ATTACK AND ALLOWED THE ENEMY TO PULL OUT FAST.
THEY'VE LEFT SOMEONE BEHIND, SIR!
CONFOUND IT, WE'VE LOST 'EM, SERGEANT!

IT PROVED TO BE A WOUNDED GERMAN AND WHEN QUESTIONED, THE PRISONER GLUMLY ADMITTED WHAT TOM HAD ALREADY GUESSED . . .
YOU WERE RIGHT, CORDER, THESE JERRIES WERE BUSY MARKING A ROUTE THROUGH THIS AREA.
SO THAT AN ENEMY FORCE COULD GET ACROSS, SIR?
THAT'S MY BET!

REALISING HE MUST OVERTAKE THE FLEEING GERMANS BEFORE THEY GOT WORD BACK, BICKNELL ORDERED THE PURSUIT. HE SPLIT HIS FORCE INTO TWO PARTIES, TOM CORDER GOING WITH LIEUTENANT NASH . . .
KEEP YOUR EYE ON MISTER NASH OR WE'LL RUN INTO ANOTHER OF THOSE DARNED QUICKSANDS.
OKAY, SARGE.

IMPATIENT THOUGH THEY WERE, THE GOING WAS NECESSARILY CAUTIOUS AND SLOW. THEN, TO INCREASE THEIR FRUSTRATION, A SANDSTORM BLEW UP. . .
CAN'T SEE A YARD AHEAD. WHAT FOUL LUCK!
MAYBE IT'S BAD LUCK FOR JERRY, TOO, SIR.

IN AN HOUR IT WAS ALL OVER, LEAVING THEM SMOTHERED IN FINE SAND. AT ONCE THEY MOVED ON AND AS NASH'S JEEP ROUNDED A ROCKY BEND, AN EAGER CRY BROKE FROM HIM . . .
STOP THE JEEP! THERE THEY ARE AHEAD...THE JERRY PARTY!
IT'S THEM ALL RIGHT, SIR!
TOM'S TRUCK GROWLED TO A STANDSTILL BEHIND THE JEEP. ENGINES WERE SWITCHED OFF...

RIGHT, WE'LL RUSH THE BLIGHTERS!
BUT, HALF A MINUTE, SIR! WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF WE SPLIT UP AND...
HERE WE GO AGAIN...JUST AS WE WERE GETTING CRACKING...

THE IMPETUOUS NASH MAY HAVE HEARD SNELL'S MUTTERED COMMENT OR HE MAY NOT, BUT HE CERTAINLY BRUSHED TOM CORDER'S CAUTIOUS ADVICE ASIDE .
NO TIME FOR THAT, SERGEANT. FOLLOW ME!
WE'LL HIT 'EM BEFORE THEY KNOW WHAT'S WHAT!

TOM CORDER SHRUGGED AND SCRAMBLED BACK BESIDE HIS DRIVER AND THE MAD RUSH WAS ON. HE SAW NASH'S JEEP ROCKING WILDLY AS IT RACED OVER THE ROUGH GROUND ...
LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER SOFT STRETCH AHEAD!
I SEE IT, SARGE!
ACHTUNG... ENGLANDERS!

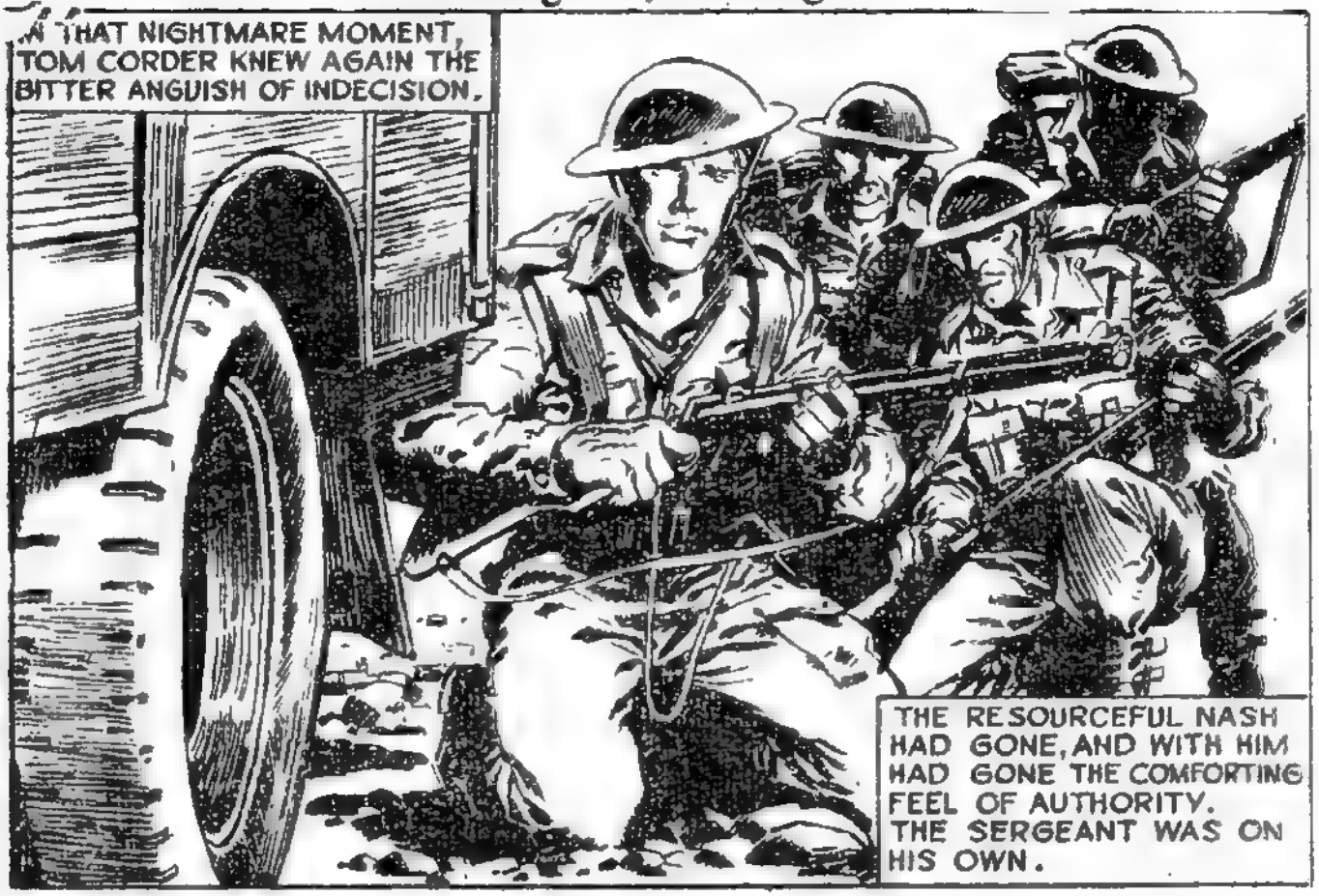
THERE WAS A DISTANT CRACK OF RIFLE-FIRE AND ALMOST INSTANTLY, NASH'S JEEP LURCHED MORE WILDLY THAN EVER . . .
LOOK OUT!
AAGH!

NASH'S DRIVER WAS HIT AND THE VEHICLE SLEWED OUT OF CONTROL INTO THE TREACHEROUS QUICKSAND...
JUMP FOR IT!

BUT LIEUTENANT NASH STOOD DEFIANT, THE TOMMY GUN BLAZING IN HIS HANDS. NEXT MOMENT, THE YOUNG OFFICER WAS FELLED BY AN ACCURATE GERMAN VOLLEY. TOM'S VOICE CRACKED IN HORROR.

SICK AT HEART, SERGEANT CORDER BROUGHT HIS TRUCK TO A SLITHERING HALT.
EVERYBODY OUT! KEEP BEHIND THE TRUCK!

SNELL AND THE DRIVER WERE TRAPPED IN THE CLOYING QUICKSAND AND THEY YELLED IN PANIC TO BE SAVED FROM A FRIGHTFUL DEATH.
QUICK! HELP!
DO SOMETHING!


IN THAT NIGHTMARE MOMENT, TOM CORDER KNEW AGAIN THE BITTER ANGUISH OF INDECISION.
THE RESOURCEFUL NASH HAD GONE, AND WITH HIM HAD GONE THE COMFORTING FEEL OF AUTHORITY. THE SERGEANT WAS ON HIS OWN.

HIS MIND GROPED FRANTICALLY FOR A SOLUTION TO THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION...THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT OUT OF COVER WOULD BRING A FATAL BURST OF FIRE FROM THE ENEMY.
YOU'VE GOT TO SAVE THOSE POOR PERISHERS, SARGE!
QUIET, FOR PETE'S SAKE...LET ME THINK...

HE HAD REJECTED ONE SLIM SOLUTION AFTER ANOTHER WHEN THE RAGGED CHATTER OF BRITISH RIFLES CAME FROM ANOTHER DIRECTION . . .
THANK HEAVENS! CAPTAIN BICKNELL'S PARTY!

THE OFFICER'S MEN HAD BEEN DRAWN THERE BY THE SOUND OF FIGHTING AND TO TOM'S INFINITE RELIEF, THEY POURED VOLLEY AFTER VOLLEY INTO A PANICKING ENEMY.
KEEP THEM BUSY, LADS!

THE INITIATIVE REGAINED, SERGEANT CORDER LED HIS MEN IN A COMBINED CHARGE WITH CAPTAIN BICKNELL'S.
GET INTO 'EM!
TWO OF YOU, SEE TO SNELL AND THE OTHER BLOKE! THE REST, FOLLOW ME!
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THE BRITISH DESERT TROOPS FELL ON THE GERMANS SAVAGELY. . .

CRUMBLING UNDER THIS DETERMINED ATTACK THE GERMANS WERE OVERWHELMED.
GOOD WORK, CORDER!

Chapter 4. DESERT TORMENT

ALL SWUNG ROUND AS THEY HEARD A TRUCK ENGINE SNARL INTO LIFE. ONE OF THE GERMANS, SHAMMING DEAD HAD TRICKED THEM . . .
AFTER HIM, SERGEANT! GET HIM . . . DEAD OR ALIVE!
RIGHT, SIR!

SHRUGGING OFF HIS ANGER AT SNELL'S ACCUSATION, TOM CORDER RACED FOR THE JEEP. ONE MAN, PRIVATE SMITH, LEAPT ABOARD BEHIND HIM . . .
GRAB HOLD . . . WE'RE GOING TO MOVE!
I'M WITH YOU, SARGE!

THEY HAD NOT GONE FAR BEFORE TOM MADE A DISCOVERY. . .
LOOK . . . MORE WOODEN STAKES . . . MARKING JERRY'S TRAIL.
IT WAS FURTHER PROOF THAT THE ENEMY HAD MAPPED THE ROUTE ACROSS THE BELT OF QUICKSANDS.

THEN, ROUNDING THE NEXT CORNER AT TOP SPEED, TOM HAD TO WRENCH MADLY AT THE WHEEL TO SAVE A POINT-BLANK COLLISION.
LOOK OUT!

FROM THE NEARBY ROCKS CAME THE VICIOUS CRACK OF A RIFLE...
AND A GERMAN BULLET FOUND ITS FATAL MARK.

SHOT AFTER SHOT FROM THE HIDDEN SNIPER RATTLED ABOUT THE JEEP. THERE WAS A MOMENTARY PAUSE...AND TOM SPRANG TO THE LEWIS GUN...
YOU SNEAKING DOG!
WITH ONE SAVAGE BURST, THE SERGEANT AVENGED PRIVATE SMITH...

BUT THE ECHOES HAD BARELY DIED, WHEN A SUDDEN BURST OF GUNFIRE KICKED UP THE SAND AT TOM'S FEET. A GUTTURAL COMMAND RANG OUT . . .
SURRENDER, ENGLANDER . . . OR YOU DIE!

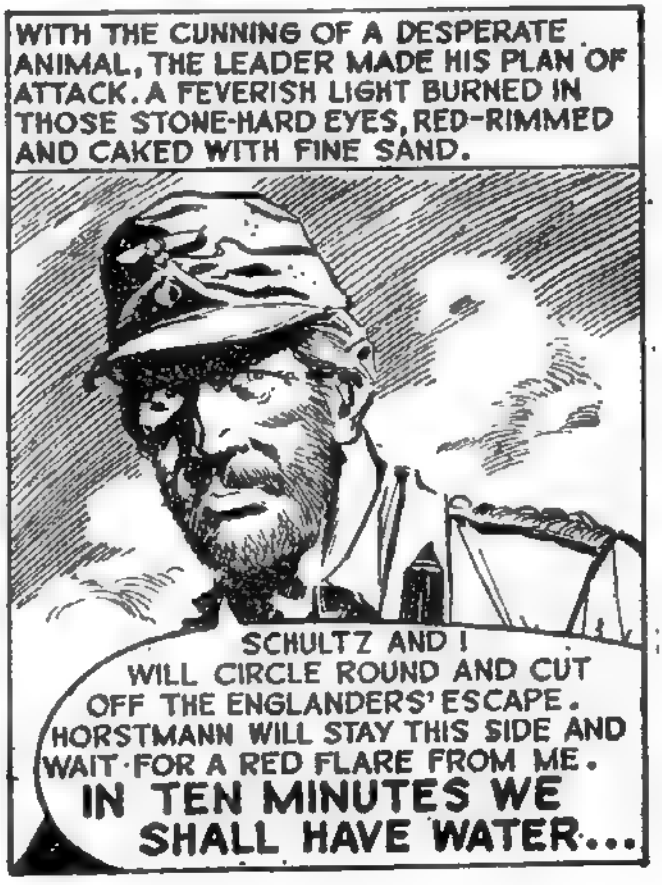
THREE GERMAN ARMOURED VEHICLES WERE SQUATTING EVILLY, HULL-DOWN ON THE RIDGE. SOME GERMANS DISMOUNTED AND STALKED TOWARDS HIM . . .
SO, THERE ARE ENGLANDER TROOPS NEAR!
WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE? ANSWER UP!
TOM REMAINED STUBBORNLY DUMB, HIS MIND STRIVING TO COPE WITH THIS SHOCK SITUATION.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE, HE NOTICED THE GERMANS SEARCHING FEVERISHLY INSIDE THE VEHICLES AND HIS GAZE SWUNG BACK TO THE OFFICER'S FACE, TAKING IN HIS CRACKED AND BLEEDING LIPS.
BY THUNDER! I BELIEVE THESE JERRIES NEED WATER ...DESPERATELY!
HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE? SPEAK, YOU VERMIN!

DESPITE ILL-HUMOURED CUFFING AND KICKING, TOM GAVE NOTHING AWAY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FLASHES ON THE GERMANS' TUNICS TOLD HIM A GREAT DEAL.
WE WILL TRACE THIS ENGLANDER'S TYRE MARKS BACK TO HIS CAMP.
AND TAKE THEIR WATER, JA!
THESE BIRDS BELONG TO THAT PANZER BUNCH WE BEAT UP.
IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT DEFEATED REMNANTS HAD SOUGHT A WAY BACK ACROSS THIS DREAD NO-MAN'S DESERT...AND FAILED.

THE THIRST-PLAGUED GERMANS DRAGGED TOM ABOARD ONE OF THE LIGHT TANKS AND CAUTIOUSLY RETRACED HIS WHEEL MARKS. THE BRITISH SERGEANT TRIED TO HIDE HIS ANXIETY AS THEY NEARED THE SPOT WHERE HE HAD LEFT THE OTHERS.
IF THE CAPTAIN HASN'T POSTED LOOKOUTS, THIS LOT WILL CATCH THEM A REAL PACKET.
824

PRESENTLY A SCOUT CAME RUNNING BACK... AND TOM'S HEART SANK.
HOW MANY, DOLT!
THE ENGLANDERS . . . JUST AHEAD!
ABOUT TWELVE, MEIN LEUTNANT...AND ONE OFFICER!


WITH THE CUNNING OF A DESPERATE ANIMAL, THE LEADER MADE HIS PLAN OF ATTACK. A FEVERISH LIGHT BURNED IN THOSE STONE-HARD EYES, RED-RIMMED AND CAKED WITH FINE SAND.
SCHULTZ AND I WILL CIRCLE ROUND AND CUT OFF THE ENGLANDERS' ESCAPE. HORSTMANN WILL STAY THIS SIDE AND WAIT FOR A RED FLARE FROM ME.
IN TEN MINUTES WE SHALL HAVE WATER...

BUT THE MUFFLED BEAT OF THE TANK ENGINE MUST HAVE REACHED THE EARS OF THE BRITISH PARTY. A SUDDEN SHOT RANG OUT AND THE GERMAN LEADER'S TANK JOLTED TO A STANDSTILL . . .
HIMMEL! WE ARE DISCOVERED!
TOM CORDER IMMEDIATELY SEIZED HIS OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE.

SPURRED BY THE UPROAR OF SUDDEN BATTLE, TOM DARTED FROM COVER TO COVER TOWARDS THE BRITISH POSITION. BUT THERE, DISMAYING NEWS AWAITED HIM . . .
THE CAPTAIN'S COPPED ONE, SARGE.
YOU . . . YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE OVER, CORDER.
TAKE OVER, SIR? WHY . . . YES, SIR.

CAPTAIN BICKNELL SLUMPED BACK, UNCONSCIOUS . . .
THIS IS IT!. . . JUST THE WAY THE CAPTAIN SAID IT MIGHT BE . . . I'M REALLY ON MY OWN THIS TIME!
BUT ONCE MORE IT WAS NOT ANY PERSONAL FEAR THAT BEGAN TO WORRY HIM, ONLY AN ANXIETY FOR THE LIVES OF THOSE UNDER HIS CHARGE.

LEAVING THE OFFICER IN THE CARE OF THE MEDICAL CORPORAL, TOM SLIPPED FORWARD TO THE MEN. HE FOUND PRIVATE SNELL CROUCHED OVER THE SIGHTS OF THEIR ANTI-TANK RIFLE . . .
THAT'S POLISHED OFF ONE OF THE JERRY'S. IF I CAN GET ME SIGHTS ON THE OTHER PERISHER, IT WON'T MATTER WHAT STUPID IDEAS SERGEANT BLOOMIN' CORDER'S GOT.

TOM CORDER IGNORED THE SARCASTIC COMMENT OF THE SURLY PRIVATE.
THERE ARE TWO MORE JERRIES, SNELL... AND ONE OF 'EM'S BEHIND US. WE'LL NEED MORE THAN ONE ANTI-TANK RIFLE TO CRACK BOTH OF 'EM!

TOM TRIED TO GAUGE THE ENEMY'S NEXT MOVE BY IMAGINING THEIR FEELINGS. HIS GUESS WAS SO ACCURATE THAT HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN LISTENING CLOSE BY.
OUR LEADER WAS TOO RECKLESS.
JA, REMEMBER THAT ONE UNLUCKY SHOT COULD IMMOBILISE US.
BUT WE MUST HAVE WATER...

TOM SUDDENLY REALISED HE HELD THE KEY TO THE SEEMINGLY INSOLUBLE PROBLEM...
IT WON'T BE BULLETS THAT'LL DECIDE THIS... IT WILL BE WATER!

HE KNEW THAT THERE WAS ENOUGH WATER FOR THEM TO WITHSTAND A SIEGE BY THE PARCHED ENEMY. BUT SOMEHOW HE HAD TO FIND A BETTER DEFENSIVE POSITION. HIS GAZE RESTED ON THE NEARBY SAND BASIN, ITS SUN-BAKED SURFACE SO DECEIVINGLY FIRM...
IF ONLY WE COULD GET ACROSS THAT DODGY STRIP, THOSE TANKS WOULDN'T DARE FOLLOW. THEN WE COULD HOLD OUT TILL JERRY PACKED IT IN.
TOM FANCIED HE COULD MAKE OUT A WINDING TRACK... MAYBE FIRM ENOUGH TO TAKE A MAN'S WEIGHT...

THEN THE HARSH NATURE OF THOSE DESOLATE WASTES CAME TO THE SERGEANT'S AID. THE STEADILY RISING WIND BROUGHT ANOTHER SANDSTORM ... A BLINDING SCREEN FROM ENEMY EYES.
COME ON... MOVE! GET DOWN TO THE TRUCK!
TRUCK... WHAT FOR?
WHAT'S THE IDEA, SARGE?

SUDDENLY TOM FELT A SURGING SENSE OF MASTERY. THIS TIME HE KNEW WHAT HE WANTED TO DO. A NEW SHARP AUTHORITY SOUNDED IN HIS VOICE...
MAKE SURE EVERY CAN OF WATER IS TAKEN. CAREFUL WITH CAPTAIN BICKNELL - AND FOLLOW ME!

THE PUZZLED MEN FOLLOWED CORDER UNTIL THEY REACHED THE EDGE OF THE STRIP OF QUICKSAND. THERE THEY HALTED... AND WOULD NOT BUDGE.
THERE'S A DIRTY GREAT QUICKSAND OUT THERE! I'M NOT CROSSING THAT!
NOR ME... JUST PLAIN SUICIDE!
YOU'RE CROSSING IT... NOW! THE FIRST MAN WHO TURNS BACK, I'LL SHOOT! AND BELIEVE ME, I MEAN IT!

IN GRUDGING OBEDIENCE THE MEN FOLLOWED HIM. WITH EVERY SLOW STEP, TOM TOOK HIS OWN AND THEIR LIVES INTO HIS HANDS. IT WAS A NERVE-WRACKING GAMBLE.
IF THIS FIRM TRACK GIVES OUT, WE'VE HAD IT!

Chapter 5. A FOOL'S GRAVE

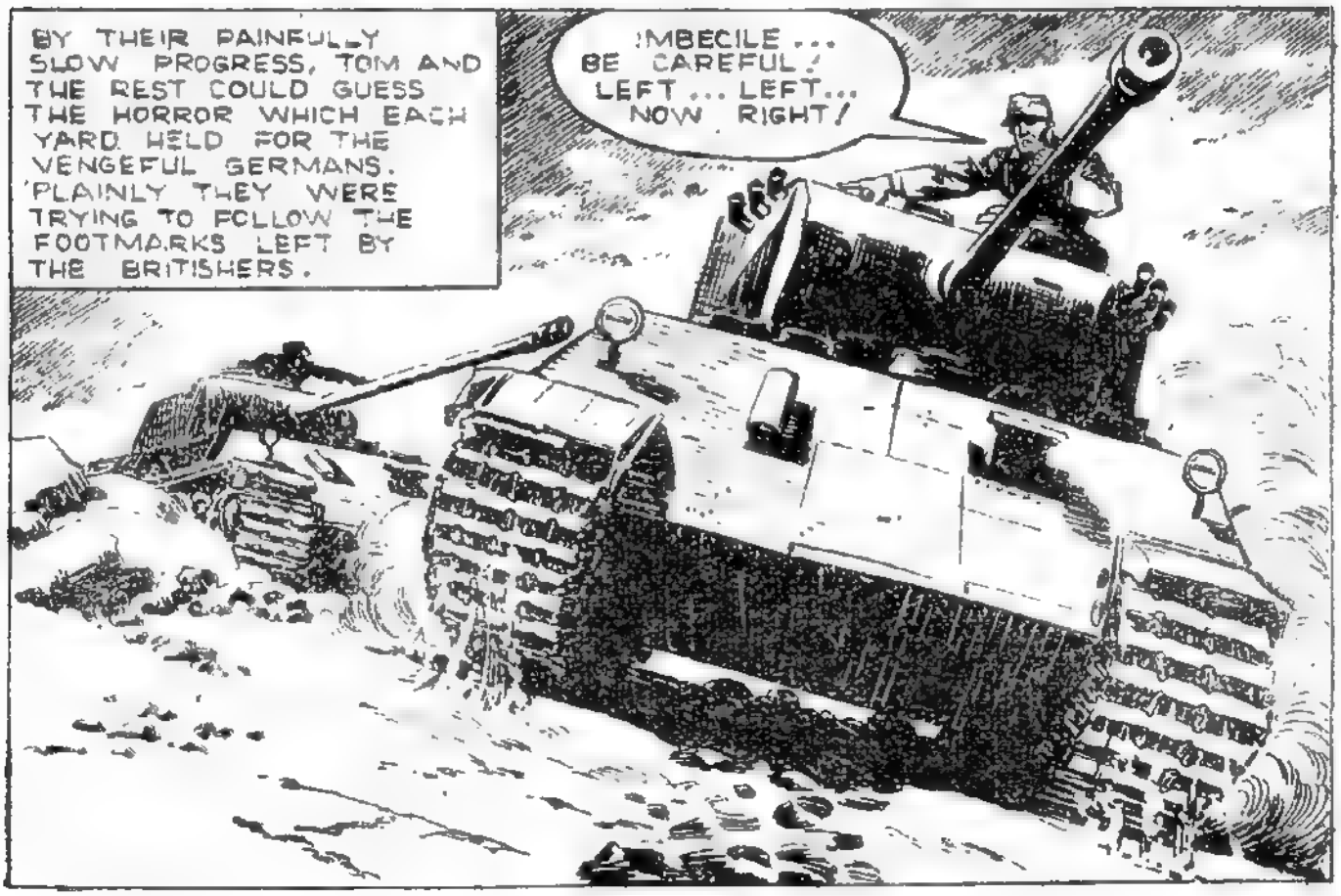
THAT NIGHT, CAPTAIN BICKNELL SEEMED TO REVIVE A LITTLE. TOM BRIEFLY EXPLAINED HIS MOVE AND WAS REWARDED WITH A QUIET SMILE.
VERY CRAFTY, SERGEANT... WELL DONE!

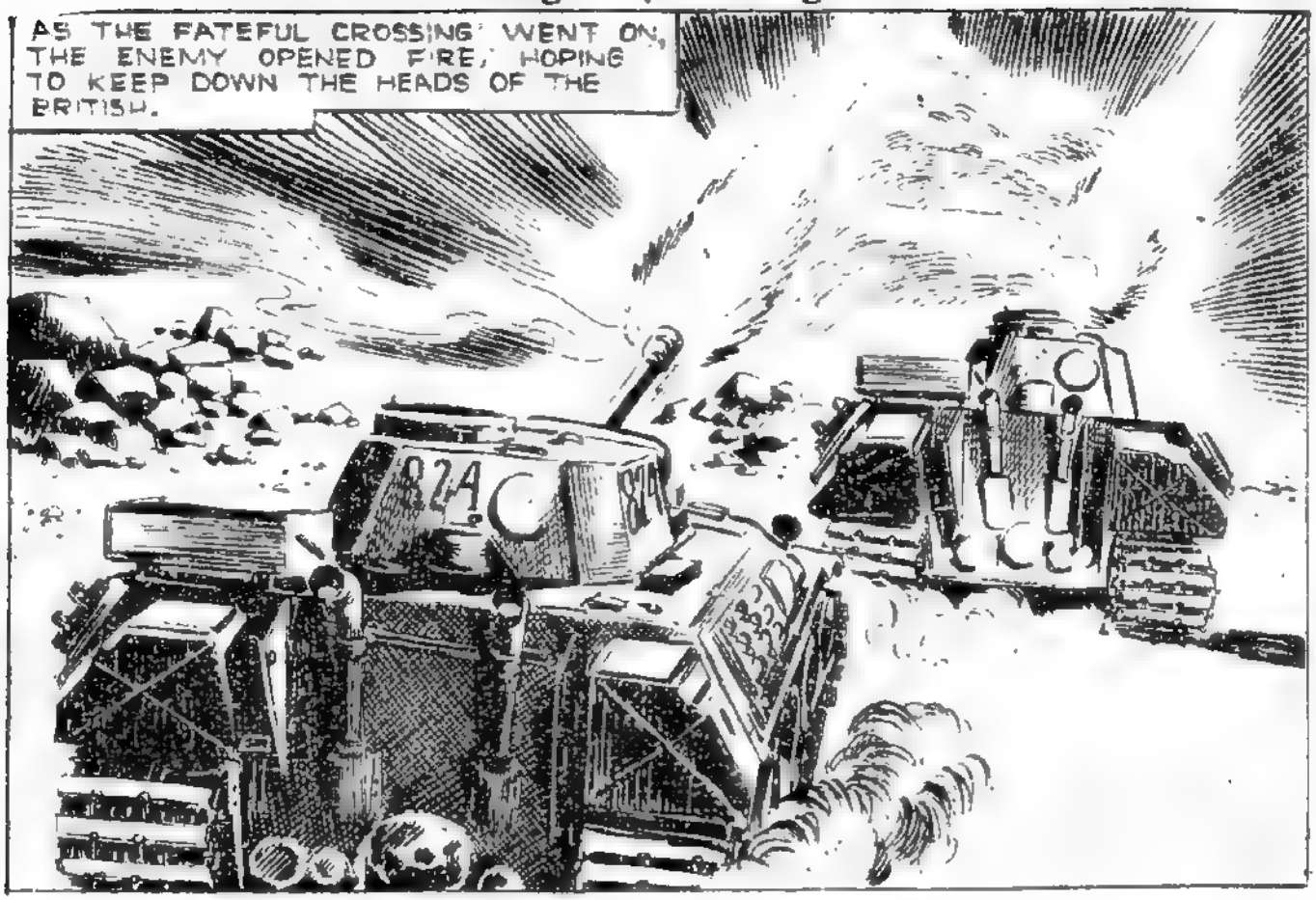
MORNING SAW THE NAZIS STILL THERE. AS THE PITILESS SUN CLIMBED ONCE MORE, TOM STUDIED THEIR MOVEMENTS INTENTLY...
THEY MUST THINK WE'VE VANISHED INTO THIN AIR, SARGE.
THAT WON'T DO! LET'S PUT THEM IN THE PICTURE!

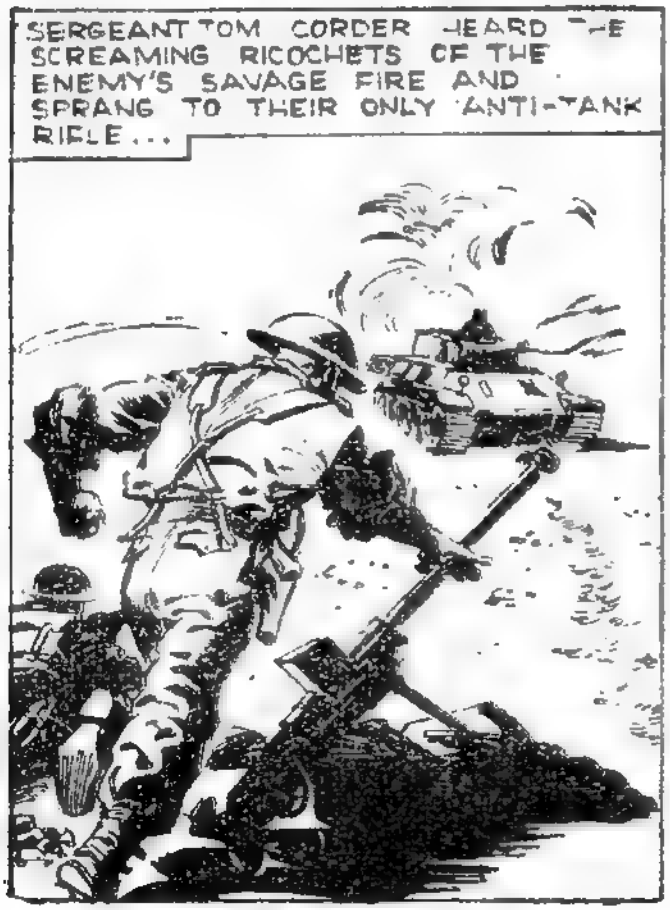
A FEW MINUTES LATER TOM STARTLED EVERYONE WITH A SINGLE EAR-SPLITTING SHOT...
WHAT THE...!
YOU'VE GIVEN THE GAME AWAY, SARGE!
THAT'S THE IDEA, LADS'...

THEN, SATISFIED THAT HE HAD ATTRACTED THE ENEMY'S ATTENTION, TOM CALLED THE MEN INTO FULL VIEW OF THE STARING GERMANS. HE BRANDISHED A WATER CAN...
OKAY, BOYS... LINE UP FOR A NICE COOLING DRINK!
IF OLD JERRY SPOTS THIS LARK...
... IT'LL DRIVE HIM CRACKERS!

ONCE AGAIN TOM WHIPPED UP HIS GLASSES. HE SAW THE GERMANS STARING TOWARDS THEM AND ARGUING. FINALLY, THEY DID SOMETHING ABOUT IT...
GREAT! THE SIGHT OF THAT WATER HAS GOADED THEM INTO ATTACKING US. THEY'LL NEVER MAKE IT!


BY THEIR PAINFULLY SLOW PROGRESS, TOM AND THE REST COULD GUESS THE HORROR WHICH EACH YARD HELD FOR THE VENGEFUL GERMANS. PLAINLY THEY WERE TRYING TO FOLLOW THE FOOTMARKS LEFT BY THE BRITISHERS.
IMBECILE... BE CAREFUL! LEFT... LEFT... NOW RIGHT!


AS THE FATEFUL CROSSING WENT ON, THE ENEMY OPENED FIRE, HOPING TO KEEP DOWN THE HEADS OF THE BRITISH.
82A


SERGEANT TOM CORDER HEARD THE SCREAMING RICOCHETS OF THE ENEMY'S SAVAGE FIRE AND SPRANG TO THEIR ONLY ANTI-TANK RIFLE...

A SECOND LATER, HE GAVE A CRY OF CONSTERNATION...
IT'S JAMMED! THE GUN'S JAMMED!
IN THAT CRITICAL MOMENT THEIR ONE EFFECTIVE WEAPON BECAME USELESS.

TOM FUMED IN IMPOTENT FURY. THEN QUITE UNEXPECTEDLY, PRIVATE SNELL CALLED ACROSS WITH A SYMPATHETIC GRIN...
HARD LUCK, SARGE! WHAT ABOUT GIVING THE PERISHERS A FEW ROUNDS OF RAPID FIRE?
SURE... WE CAN TRY IT!

TOM SPRANG TO HIS FEET. HIS YELLED COMMAND BECAME LOST IN THE SUDDEN CRASH OF BRITISH RIFLES...
FIRE!

PUNY AS THEIR BULLETS WERE AGAINST ARMOUR PLATING, THE SUDDEN FIERCE FIRE HAD THE EFFECT TOM HOPED FOR... THE STARTLED LEADING DRIVER LOST CONTROL. IN A SECOND THE STEEL-CLAD MONSTER WAS LURCHING WILDLY IN THE GRIP OF THE QUICKSAND.

QUICK! JUMP!

LET ME OUT!

UNNERVED BY THEIR COMPANION'S FATE, THE SECOND GERMAN CREW REDOUBLED THE FURY OF THEIR FIRE.

LUMME! THAT'S MADE JERRY MAD!

DOWN! KEEP DOWN!

A MOMENT LATER THE HARD-PRESSED DEFENDERS WERE STARING OUT WITH DELIGHTED EXPRESSIONS. TO THEIR EARS CAME THE HARSH BUT WELCOME CRACKLE OF VICKERS MACHINE-GUNS...

HEY, LOOK! BRITISH TANKS!

TOM'S MEN BROKE INTO CHEERING AS THEY RECOGNISED A COUPLE OF LIGHT TANKS OF THEIR OWN BRIGADE. THEIR COMBINED FIRE, DIRECTED AT THE REMAINING ENEMY TANK, WAS A SIGHT TO SEE.

COMPLETELY DEMORALISED, THE ENEMY FRANTICALLY WAVED A WHITE FLAG...

THERE WAS A CHEERY REUNION WITH THE BRITISH NEWCOMERS.

THIS IS GREAT. HOW DID YOU FIND US?

WE HEARD THE SHOOTING.

LONG TIME, NO SEE. THE OLD MAN GOT WORRIED.

GUESSING AT THE BRIGADIER'S FIERY IMPATIENCE, TOM RACED BACK TO HEADQUARTERS. THE BIG MAN HEARD HIS STORY WITH CLOSE INTEREST. THEN HE HAD A GRUFF QUESTION.

THESE GUIDE STAKES THE GERMANS PLANTED... DO YOU REALLY THINK THEY WOULD LEAD US ACROSS THE JERIDA BELT?

I'M PRETTY SURE, SIR.

GOOD! THEN YOU'RE GOING TO SHOW US THE WAY, SERGEANT.

MEANWHILE TOM'S GALLANT PARTY WERE BROUGHT BACK AND CAPTAIN BICKNELL TAKEN CARE OF. PRESENTLY A STEEL LINE OF BRITISH ARMOURED MIGHT STRUCK OUT ACROSS THE JERIDA BELT.

THERE ARE THE STAKES SIR.

RIGHT!

AT THE SAME TIME, THE RECENTLY MAULED PANZER BRIGADE HAD ACTED AS EXPECTED... THEY HAD ROUNDED THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE JERIDA BELT AND WERE NOW POUNDING NORTH...

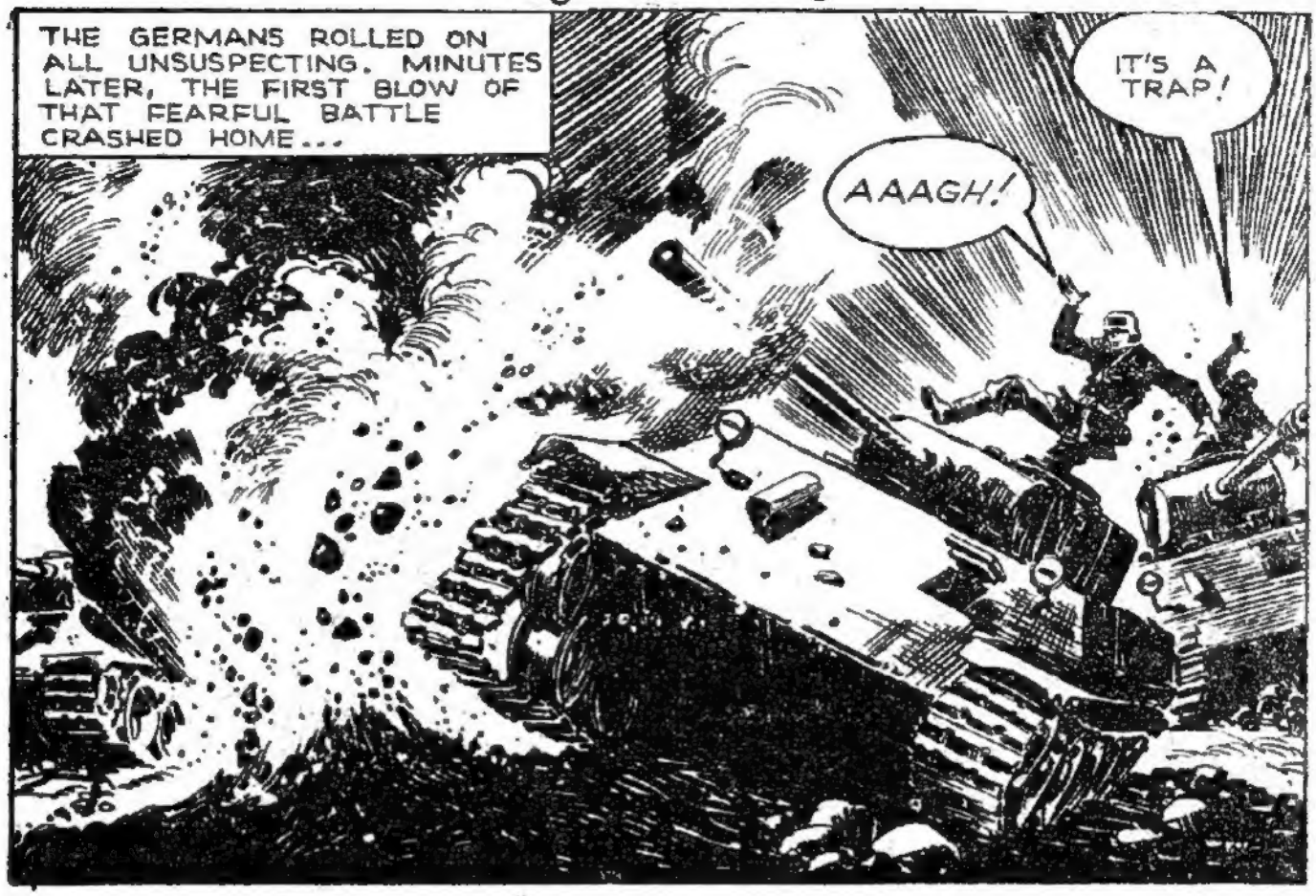
WE GAVE THOSE FLAT-FOOTED ENGLANDERS THE SLIP, JA!

JA, JA!

JUST FIVE MILES TO THE NORTH, SERGEANT TOM CORDER WAS HAVING HIS HOUR OF TRIUMPH. THE GERMAN GUIDE STAKES HAD LED THEM ALL SAFELY ACROSS THE BELT... AND NOW CAME THE SHOWDOWN!

ENEMY APPROACHING, SIR!.

RIGHT, GENTLEMEN... STAY HIDDEN TILL THE LAST MOMENT... *THEN LET 'EM HAVE IT!*


THE GERMANS ROLLED ON ALL UNSUSPECTING. MINUTES LATER, THE FIRST BLOW OF THAT FEARFUL BATTLE CRASHED HOME...
AAAGH!
IT'S A TRAP!

SHOCKED AND DAZED, THE ONCE ELITE PANZER BRIGADE, HARD-BITTEN DESERT VETERANS TO A MAN, BEGAN MILLING AROUND IN A PANIC-RIDDEN DUSTBOWL OF UTTER DEFEAT.
EVERYWHERE THEY TURNED, BRITISH GUNS BLASTED THEM BACK INTO THE SEETHING HOLOCAUST. THIS TIME THERE WAS NO ESCAPE.

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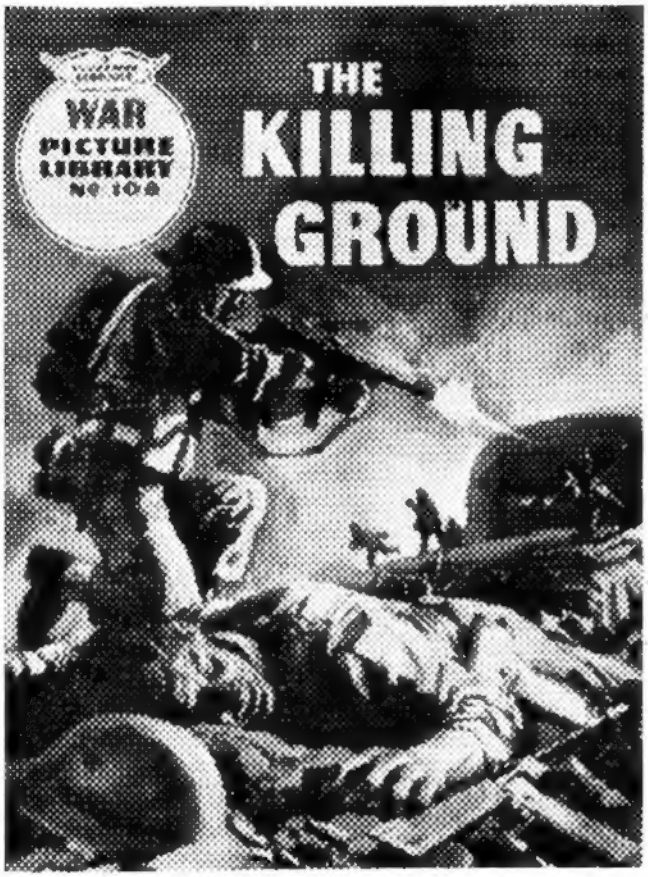

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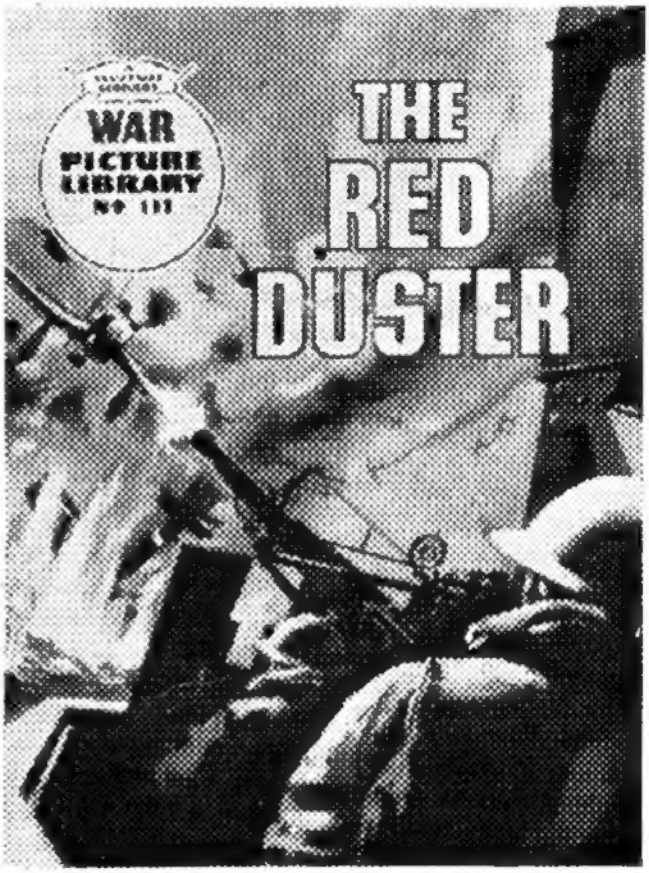

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